DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 102 543 CS 201 749

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TITLE A Work of Global Status: A New Reading Curriculum in English.
PUB DATE Aug 74
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (7th, Saskatchewan, August 19-23, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *American Literature; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; *English Curriculum; *English Literature; *Reading Materials; Secondary Education; *World Literature

ABSTRACT

The English language is now used by a quarter of the world's population and is both spoken and written in many parts of the world. Yet the reading curriculum in our schools usually represents only the history of English writing in Britain and America. This paper stresses the need to expand the content of the school reading curriculum to include English writing from other parts of the world, reflecting the nature and present global status of writing English. The complete reading curriculum should contain four kinds of literature: British, American, world in translation, and new world in English. In addition to studying this literature, students should also examine the varying cultures and peoples that produce it. (TO)

ED102543

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A WORK OF GLOBAL STATUS: A New Reading Curriculum in English

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There are three parts to this paper:

I The introduction of new materials results not only in a new reading curriculum but in a new kind of reading curriculum.

II There are a number of reasons why new material should be introduced into the reading curriculum.

III Certain large concepts should guide the introduction of the new material.

I A New Kind of Reading Curriculum:

One of the novels in English best-known to English teachers is Ashton Warner's Spinster, the story of an elementary teacher in New Zealand who tries to change the readers used in her classroom from the imported "Janet and John" ("Dick and Jane") books to those actually written by her pupils, the Maori children of the district. Naturally, it ends tragically, but that has not discouraged a large number of North American teachers from reading more of her work, especially the book entitled Teacher. In response to its enthusiastic reception in

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America, Sylvia Ashton Warner wrote an introduction to a later work, Myself, addressed "To a Young Teacher", and in it she poses a fundamental question: "How do you see teaching - as a source of income or as a work of global status?"

If we choose the latter alternative we should look at our reading curriculum and ask to what extent it reflects the global status of English as a world language. We have known for more than three hundred years that English is not confined any longer to its original homeland, and we know that it is now used by a quarter of the world's population. What we would not realise from our present curriculum of reading in British and American literature is that English is not only spoken but also written in many parts of the world. Should we not therefore revise our reading curriculum to make it represent not only the history of English writing in Britain and America but also its present world geography?

In a position paper entitled "New Traditions in English," written for the 1974 Fall Conference of the Arkansas Council of Teachers of English, Priscilla Tyler begins: "One of the traits of the European is that he has been for four centuries a world traveller." This is a reminder that an awareness of the geography of English and of literature in English is long overdue, but it also indicates one of the values of revising the reading curriculum so as to make students aware not only of the history of the literature which composes the curriculum but also of the fact that no sooner was the literature established, say, with Shakespeare than it began to spread with the expansion of the original language area in which and for which Shakespeare was writing. That

Shakespeare himself became aware of this is seen in the position of The Tempest in his canon and in the nature of the work itself; the crucial archetype he uncovered in Prospero, Miranda and Caliban has been used again and again to describe the human situation of one culture invading another - which is largely the history of the world in the last four centuries.

Priscilla Tyler also remarks that "European culture with its long literary tradition is word-centered" and contrasts the literate use of the word (we remember all those Indian treaties) with its oral use in the cultures engrossed by European expansion. An awareness that all literature is inevitably the record of the result of interaction between literacy and oracy is more highly developed in those literatures in English which have resulted from the expansion of the language than it is in the original literature where the oral was almost suppressed in the courtly tradition. That awareness, for instance, accounts for the classic stature of Huckleberry Finn which has to be heard as well as read. A revision of the reading curriculum which incorporates more of the new national literatures in English and less of the traditional British materials would remind our students of the necessary and healthy influence of the spoken on the written word. This, then, is a second direction in which the reading curriculum might be revised - towards its global status, a reflection of the world and a reminder of the word.

The conclusion of Dr. Tyler's paper is the statement: "The knowing of literature leads on to the teaching of literature so that others may know." That indeed is the nub of the question in proposing a revision of the reading curriculum to accomodate work from all the areas where

English is a literary medium. The English teacher has not been prepared by college courses to teach the literature - she knows little of the English writing now coming out of Africa or that which has been coming from the Caribbean since 1950 or from India since 1940 or from South Africa and New Zealand since 1900 or from Australia and Canada for the last one hundred and fifty years.

But that is no great problem. Indeed it is an opportunity for the teacher to make her own curriculum by following her own exploration of the new material - by exploring it along with her students. This would indeed be a revolutionary kind of reading curriculum where one did not know the point of arrival, where the pleasure of the journey lies in the travelling, not the destination. And that may be the best reason for proposing to revise the reading curriculum along unknown paths, by converting it into a workshop of discovery rather than a syllabus of work to be covered. Each teacher makes her own reading curriculum with the help of the students. This is not impossible today given the unit or modular structure of English courses in many secondary schools in American states and Canadian provinces. What is novel perhaps is the idea that students should write their own curriculum within the guiding concepts of the teacher.

These preliminary remarks are intended to emphasize that one cannot expect to change the content of one's reading curriculum without the form itself being changed. In effect we are proposing a clearer pattern and purpose to the reading curriculum in English. The pattern would reflect the real nature and present global status of writing in English, and the purpose of showing the real federated world nature of

all literature in English is to introduce the student to the real federated world we live in, to our "global village".

The literature we propose to introduce is already patterned for us in two ways. First, much of it from Africa, Australasia, Asia and the Caribbean is already covered by the term "Commonwealth" literature and a certain amount of information about it can be found under that heading. Second, the pattern of American literature is well known historically and geographically - its development and its regional nature. When we appreciate that these two bodies of literature comprise New World literature in English we can see that American literature is the first and hence the classic New World literature in English and that its pattern is recognisable in other New World literatures in English - a historical pattern of discovery, colonisation, independence, clash with native cultures, the immigrant experience, the frontier, and so on. Thus an overall pattern does exist for the inclusion of the new material; the known pattern of American literature is a microcosm of the macrocosmic New World literature in English; the known pattern has simply to be expanded to include the new material. But that expanded pattern has to be discerned by the teacher. She has to know <u>why</u> she is expanding the curriculum and <u>where</u> that expansion is headed.

II <u>Why Introduce the New Material?</u>

Updating the reading curriculum to correspond with the actual state of writing in English would bring English as a subject into line with other humanities subjects such as social studies and history where the student is expected by graduation to have an understanding of world

history, the peoples of the world, world geography and so on. In the treatment of so-called World Literature in Grades 9/10 it is often forgotten that there is a world literature in English, in the student's own language, which consists both of translations from other languages and of writing in English from around the world.

The complete reading curriculum, therefore, may be conceived as having four parts: British; American; World (translation); and New World Literature in English. The modification proposed is to add the last of the four parts in order to achieve completeness in the English reading program.

a. The last thorough-going revision of the literature curriculum in North American schools was probably just after the Second World War when twentieth century literature became fashionable, more and later American writers were added, and World literature in translation was included. It is time to recognise that the post-war situation has at last altered, that the former simple answers to world problems have now become complex responses to shifting and dangerous situations which are usually precipitated not by the great powers but by very small nations; we need to recognise the federated and inevitably engagé world into which our children are moving, where a tribal riot in Africa, say, can cause a great-power confrontation. We live more and more in One World. And though some of the new materials we are considering come from relatively small and weak developing nations it is precisely because of this that they should be introduced to our children. How much better could we have coped with Vietnam or the oil crisis had our children and hence our young soldiers and our elder diplomats been thoroughly acquainted at an early age with the Oriental

mind or the Islamic way of thought? And who can do this for our students if it is not the English teacher by introducing the clearest and easiest means of appreciation of foreign ways of thought - their literatures - into the curriculum?

The time is therefore ripe for an overhaul of the English curriculum which has for a number of years now been preoccupied with the New English as language study; we are proposing the New English in literary study.

b. In the last thirty years (since the last revision on a general scale of the curriculum) a great deal of writing in English has appeared in and is available from English-speaking areas where it was not thought possible before 1939 - from India, Africa, the Caribbean. At the same time the established national literatures of other parts of the English community - Canada, Australia, for example - have become (often along with American literature) a newly introduced part of the English curriculum in these countries. After the introduction of the national literature into the English curriculum we often find a reaching out to include other national literatures which are similar to our own in language and ideas. This proposed revision would follow that current.

c. The broadening of the reading curriculum which has taken place in recent years has mainly been a response to national movements - the inclusion of Afro-American or Women's literature, for instance, or of science fiction. The new material we propose to include completes that broadening process - by including the literature of ethnic minorities other than Black, such as Asians, but chiefly by following that broadening to its logical conclusion: Just as Black American literature courses eventually found

they had to complete the material by drawing on African literature in English, so Women's literature courses will need to be able to include women writers and Woman in literature not only from American and European sources but from all over the globe.

d. This awareness that any new fashion in reading materials (such as Black literature) has a real boundary beyond the confines of the nation corresponds to the increasing international awareness at all levels of life. For instance, some students will undoubtedly spend part of their lives working abroad; again, within any community one can find a number of links with the greater world, and these people can serve as resource persons in introducing the new materials. But the main reason for using this opportunity to complete the broadening of the curriculum already under way is the preparation of our students to live in the twenty-first century and in the third century of North America. By the year 2000 the students graduating from our high schools in the decade 1975-85 will compose that vital middle range of teachers, business-men, administrators and leaders in the 35-45 year old bracket.

e. One way of preparing those students for that task is to revitalise their interest in language - in English, that is - by introducing fresh material. This new material has two attractive features for the growing English teacher - its novelty and its lack of a heavy overlay of critical material. This means that the teacher and student are often on the same level in approaching the material and that new teaching methods often result from such a democratic situation, something more like a workshop than an English lesson.

An example of the effect of such a workshop - in other words, an

indication of the implications of modifying the curriculum along the lines proposed - can be seen in considering the use of a survey course in Commonwealth literature which tries to present the diverse material as an entity of some sort.

In the exploration of examples of Commonwealth writing to discover some general concepts which may underlie all that writing, we have to acknowledge that we are dealing not just with the literature of the Commonwealth but with that written in English anywhere outside its original homeland in Britain. For this expanded body of writing the term "New World" literature serves to indicate that all of it stems from the original impulse of native speakers of English to find and settle the New World, first in America, then in Africa and Australasia, an impulse that increased in energy until it had established English as the present-day language of the Commonwealth wherever the backwash of empire has established the newer nations of the Commonwealth. For example, when we study the similarities and differences between Canadian and Commonwealth literatures we are in a fair way to seeing the relationship between Canadian and American literature, the earliest and now classic English literature of the New World.

The effect of such an expanded sense of Commonwealth literature is not only to clarify the relations between Canadian and American literature but also to discover how the New World experience of European man and the races he involved in his expansion is embodied in New World literature - how it is really different from Old World literature, of which our readiest example is British literature. We therefore come to understand the relations between an Old World literature in English, with its roots deep

in Germanic and Classical literatures and cultures, and those New World literatures in English which exhibit the sea-change experienced by the Old World or British literary tradition when it crossed the waters of the world to establish the new national literatures in English which make up Commonwealth literature and its larger body, New World literature in English.

This means that for the first time we have a body of writing in English which can be used to make comparisons with the oldest body of writing in English, British literature, which is the staple of our curriculum. We have probably unconsciously considered that literature to be Literature, so that there is something canonical about Shakespeare, and other bodies of writing in English, such as American or Canadian literature, to be variants from the norm or the tradition. Recognizing that in New World terms the Old World or British literature is just as much a variant from our norms enables us to look at it as the product of a certain people over a certain period in a certain area and to discover its "British" qualities as we hope to find the Canadian qualities in our own literature. And that would be a first step to writing a history of literature in English, rather than a history of British literature with some attention paid to American, Canadian and other Commonwealth forms.

Such an idea suggests a reconsideration of the canon of literature we teach in our schools and that is one of the healthiest results of the introduction of new literature into the curriculum.

III Guiding Ideas:

If the teacher agrees with these reasons for converting the English reading curriculum into "a work of global status" and thus embarking both

on a new kind of curriculum and on the knowing of new materials - then a few large ideas may guide both the selection of material and the pattern the new curriculum takes, and hence reveal more clearly its purpose.

a. There is no difference between teaching literature and teaching world literature. Presumably when we say we teach literature we mean both a work or works which can be called literary - that possess the quality known as literature - and also that whole body of such works from which we choose the work we teach. That whole body is obviously of great size in time and space, even if we limit it to work in English. Using the adjective "world" stresses the body or quantity of the mass, rather than its essence or "literary" nature. Yet that essence is also felt to be "world" in the sense that the prime criterion of "literary" is that it shall be "universal." To talk about "world" literature, then, is not simply to stress the quantity in the gross term "literature," but also to emphasise that the validity of the quality known as "literary" is based on the quantity contained in that term.

The teacher who takes seriously the meaning of English as a world language and literature is not then debasing the subject by introducing material which is not as "universally" recognised as Shakespeare. She is, in effect, questioning whether Shakespeare is as "universal" (or "literary") as we have always supposed. The end effect ought to be questioning the connotation of "universal" in the strict sense in the general term "literature."

b. A second idea is an appreciation of the history of the language in relation to its geographical expansion. This means going back to the formation of Modern English in the sixteenth century in and about London and recognising that for much of the history of literary English the British writers were unlike Shakespeare in that they were at least bilingual - they

knew Latin if not Greek as well as they knew English. Although this biligualism persists as late as James Joyce and is by no means dead, after the eighteenth century writers of fiction and some poets tended to be monolingual; this monolingualism is the characteristic of most of the areas settled and occupied by English speakers in the expansion of their original language area into North America and Australasia. But in Asia and Africa bilingualism among the native peoples was the result of that expansion. Therefore English exists today is two situations - a more or less monolingual condition where the second language has only minimal use, and a bilingual situation where the native mother tongue is as important as the lingua franca, world English. These two situations are parts of the whole global status of world English and the tendency now is for its bilingual situation to be recognised as the more important; where its original bilingual situation was a combination of two languages, English and Latin, its contemporary situation is a combination of English and a whole world of native mother tongues ranging from French in Canada and Maori in New Zealand to the diversity of languages in India or any African country.

This view of the global status of English as a world language is reflected in world literature in English in the different glossaries needed for works from different countries. Although this might seem to inhibit the introduction of such material into the curriculum, it is actually beneficial in indicating to the student that his monolingual condition could be subject to change in the years ahead, that although he can use English in practically every country in the world he should be aware that in many countries it is used in conjunction with a native tongue.

c. If one becomes aware of the possibility of classifying all literature in English either as New World or Old World (British), then one can begin to see the differences between them. The adjective "New" indicates the chief difference - the novelty of New World literature that we meet not only in the placenames of the New World - New York, New Zealand - but also in its basic concepts. The difficulty here is that we tend to use Old World literature in English as the basis of comparison - whatever is not similar to Old World literature is not literature. We have to realise that the New World literature is not less than the Old - it is other than. This idea has been discussed in the preceding section of this paper; the implication for the new reading curriculum is that in the absence of clear formulations of the identity or nature of this "new" material we have to let it identify itself. That is to say, instead of proceeding deductively as we do in treating, say, Romantic literature (i.e. by defining the term and then identifying its characteristics in the works we study from that period), we have to proceed inductively by identifying the self-characteristics of a work from the new literature, then comparing them with similar characteristics found in other works and thus gradually formulating a concept of the identity (or novelty) of the "new" material.

This is to suggest that embarking on a coherent study of the new material as a single unit or body of work is in fact to begin comparative literary study in one language. The concept of comparative study is usually restricted to works in different languages and does not find much reflection at the secondary school level. But it is the basis of all literary study if that study is to be not a sequence of works but a unitary activity aimed at a definition of literature. The third guiding idea of the teacher should be that the kind of study or use of the new literature in the

classroom is the exercise of comparison.

Comparative study of the new materials to establish the nature of its "novelty" enables us to compare in turn the nature of New and Old World literatures in English and hence to establish the nature of literature in English. This ultimate achievement of a coherent reading curriculum that makes sense of the term "literature in English" is in turn modified by awareness of the global situation of the English language and of what is implied in the term "World" literature - or the literature of the world. Or, simply, literature. Through the advancing steps of the new reading curriculum we become aware that our subject as teachers of English is the literate record in that language of the verbal imagination of its speakers over time and space. And by that means we approach the mystery of the imagination of Man which has apparently always needed and will always need literature. I can think of no finer purpose in life and that is why I think teaching English is a work of global status.